



A special reception at the Digicel offices marks the beginning of “The Special Olympics Awareness Week”

When Arutro “Tuyo” Werleman, President of the Aruba Special Olympics Committee and Director of the Foundation for the Mentally Handicapped stepped to the podium on Sunday evening to greet the gathering in front of the Digicel offices on L.G. Smith Boulevard, he was filled with a sense of accomplishment. Since the establishment of Aruba’s own Special Olympics five years ago, he has seen participation in the event grow from eighty special athletes to nearly five hundred participating in a wide variety of competitions. In the last few years, they have been joined by delegations from Curacao and Bonaire, and a representative from Saint Martaan attended last year’s games to observe and learn towards the purpose of beginning a Special Olympics on that island.

Tuyo reminded the audience of how important it is to involve the members of the handicapped community in training for and the events of sport competition, not only playing games. Special Olympics help maintain healthy bodies, and provides the participants with the confidence building and gratification of winning, further enriching their lives.

Also present was President and one of the founders of the Foundation for the Mentally Disabled, Christina v/d Berg de Frietas and Lila Mackay, National Director of the Special Olympics Committee to award plaques to a number of special athletes that have participated in the event since its inception. Also honored were Doctor Emil Westrate, Lourdes Angela, and Gerad van Vliet, coaches and other long time supporters of the Olympics.

Vanessa Bernabela and Dr. Westrate cut the ribbon on the Digicel offices official sponsors of the Special Olympics, which will be home to an exhibition of Five Years of Special Olympics memorabilia during awareness week. For all those interested in the history of this exceptional event, it is a fascinating and inspiring chronicle.

Everyday through Saturday, May 28 there will be varying events of interest. Members of the Royal Dutch Football Association that are expert in soccer for the handicapped are on Aruba to conduct clinics, of which the first will be held on at 8:30 am on Wednesday, May 25 at the Britannia Field, followed by a soccer match. There will be two additional clinics, 10:30 am on Thursday, May 26 at Emma School in Hato, and the next morning at the EPB Hato, also at 10:30 am. The ATV Television network is devoting a portion of its TV program “Time Out” to the Special Olympics at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, May 25, as is Tele Aruba at 6 pm on the same day, with local talk show host Dika.

The week long awareness program will end on Saturday in the auditorium of the EPI Hospitality and Tourism School with a lecture and film at 7 pm and the public is encouraged to attend. Aruba’s special athletes are a source of pride to all native islanders, having brought home medals from games around the Caribbean and the last World Special Olympics in Ireland. The teams are even now training hard and looking forward to attending the World Games in Beijing in 2007, and they need your support!